

High-flying Pakistan take on strong Sri Lanka in next ODI challenge

By Kashif Abbasi

RAWALPINDI: After beating a depleted South African side 2-1 in the recently-concluded One-day International series, Pakistan will take on a stronger Sri Lankan outfit in another three-match rubber here at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium from Tuesday.

The series win against South Africa marked a successful beginning to Shaheen Shah Afridi's fresh stint as the new Pakistan captain, having replaced Mohammad Rizwan last month in an abrupt manner.

The Sri Lanka challenge will be different for the pacer, given that he won his maiden ODI series as skipper with first-choice players at his disposal against a South African team missing the likes of senior pros Temba Bavuma, Aiden Markam, Kagiso Rabada and Keshav Maharaj and

Match starts at 2:30pm (PST)

The Islanders, led by Charith Asalanka, in contrast, arrive in Rawalpindi with a full-strength team and a top form in the format — having won the last six of their seven ODI series, including those against the strong India and Australia to rise to fourth in the International Cricket Council ODU rankings.

Shaheen, however, did not touch upon his views on the upcoming contests, which would see the sides come against each other for the second and third games on Thursday and Saturday, respectively.

But he did reveal what went on in the background before he was handed the ODI captaincy at the expense of Rizwan — who was ripped off the position despite winning series in Australia and South Africa last year before a disastrous campaign in the ICC Champions Trophy earlier this year had raised questions over his performance.

“Rizwan was the only person [from the team] I had a discussion with when I was about to be appointed as captain,” said the Pakistan pace spearhead in the pre-series press conference here on Monday. “I asked him how he felt and what he wanted.

“Rizwan is a good human and he decided himself to stake a step back and let me replace him, and that was how the decision was taken.”

Shaheen had been in Rizwan's position himself when he had replaced Babar Azam as Pakistan's T20I skipper back in 2024 before being placed by the latter after just one series in charge.

The pacer, who lead Pakistan to the national side's first-ever ODI series vic-

tory over South Africa at home last week, said the past did not spill into his decisions in the present and that he took advice from all his team-mates as captain.

“I talk to everyone for advice and I am not too egoistic to not talk to the ex captains because of things that happened in the past,” he said.

Moreover, Shaheen was not reluctant to back both Babar and Rizwan amid their recent struggles in white-ball cricket, observing that responsibility was for every player to take and not only for the established pros.

“Everyone has to take responsibility if you want to improve as a team,” the 25-year-old, who managed three wickets at an average of 38 in his first series as captain. “It's not just for Rizwan, Babar, Fakhar [Zaman], Shaheen, Saim [Ayub] to ensure this. The first and the last, all players should take responsibility.

“As far as Rizwan is concerned, he is Pakistan's top-scorer in one-dayers since 2023. We are trying to back players who are not in form so that they can do well in future matches. If you get hopeless about such players it will bring in worse results. We have to go into matches as a unit and win them as a unit.”

Babar, too, despite getting starts, failed to come up to the fans' expectations, scoring only 45 runs across the three matches against the Proteas. Shaheen believed the right-hander would bounce back with a big performance in the near future.

“Babar can falter in one or two matches but he is in good touch and I hope he will score a hundred soon,” he said.

While no guarantees have been assured to Shaheen at least publicly by the PCB about the longevity of his stint as the skipper, the left-armner is looking forward to the 2027 ODI World Cup — which will be played in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

“My job as captain is to ensure how to improve our one-day cricket and how to take my fellow players forward,” he said.

For Sri Lanka, the Pakistan series would be about sticking to the basics if they are to carry their decent form into the contests.

“I think it's always competitive cricket when Sri Lanka and Pakistan face each other, and I expect some exciting cricket from tomorrow,” Asalanka told reporters. “We just want to focus on our basics and see what happens.

“Pakistan played good cricket in their last series. We played about 30-45 days ago, in Zimbabwe, and especially our ODI side has been doing really well. For us, it's about sticking to the basics, keeping things simple, and backing our strengths.”

Zimbabwe name squad for Pakistan T20 tri-series

HARARE: Zimbabwe Cricket on Monday announced a 15-man squad for the upcoming T20 International triangular series in Pakistan, also featuring Sri Lanka, as part of the team's build-up to next year's ICC T20 World Cup.

The only change from the squad that recently faced Afghanistan at home sees pace spearhead Blessing Muzarabani miss out due to a back injury, with Newman Nyamhuri coming in as his replacement, read a press release issued by Zimbabwe Cricket.

Led by Sikandar Raza, Zimbabwe will open their campaign against hosts Pakistan in Rawalpindi on Nov 17, before

facing Sri Lanka at the same venue on Nov 19.

Zimbabwe will then travel to Lahore for their remaining round-robin fixtures — meeting Pakistan again on Nov 23 and Sri Lanka on Nov 25.

The top two teams on the points table will contest the final on Nov 29 in Lahore. Squad: Sikandar Raza (captain), Brian Bennett, Ryan Burl, Graeme Cremer, Bradley Evans, Clive Madande, Tinoenda Maposa, Wellington Masakadza, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Tony Munyonga, Tashinga Musekiwa, Dion Myers, Richard Ngarava, Newman Nyamhuri, Brendan Taylor.—Agencies

Fourth New Zealand-WI T20 washed out

NELSON: The fourth Twenty20 International between New Zealand and the West Indies was abandoned because of rain on Monday after less than seven overs of play.

New Zealand remain 2-1 up in the series with the fifth and final match to be played in Dunedin on Thursday.

The West Indies had reached 38-1 off 6.3 overs after being asked to bat when a second rain interruption brought the final halt to the contest at the Saxton Oval.

Alick Athanaze, who made 21, was the only wicket to fall when he attempted to loft a James Neesham delivery over mid-on only to miscue and



RAWALPINDI: Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi and head coach Mike Hesson inspect the pitch at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Monday.—Tanveer Shahzad/White Star

Fritz overpowers Musetti to start with win at ATP Finals

TURIN: Last year's losing finalist Taylor Fritz beat Italian Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-4 in a dominant display by the American to win his opening round-robin match of the ATP Finals in Turin on Monday.

Musetti, a late replacement after the withdrawal of seven-times winner Novak Djokovic, began brightly but started to tire despite the backing of a largely partisan crowd at the Inalpi Arena, and Fritz proved unstoppable once his service game got going.

The turning point came in the third game when Fritz saved four break points, serving two aces in the process, and then broke Musetti to lead 3-1. The Italian, who won to love in his first service game, faced break points for the rest of the first set.

"I did a great job early on in the match to serve my way out of

trouble and save some break points," Fritz said. "I'm really happy. I thought I did a lot of things really well."

Musetti, beaten by Djokovic in an almost three-hour final in Athens on Saturday, managed to claw back four break points in the second set opener, but two double faults in his next service game gave Fritz the decisive break.

Fritz served nine aces in the second set, serving to love on three occasions, but the crowd roared back to life when Musetti took a 30-0 lead with the American serving for the match, only for Fritz to reply with two aces to wrap up an impressive win.

"The whole second set I played well and had a lot of chances to break that I didn't get," Fritz added. "I'm really happy I was able to serve it out there and he

didn't come back to ruin it."

Musetti's debut at the ATP Finals ended in defeat, but he managed to entertain the expectant Italian fans with some deft drop-shots to bring Fritz to the net and follow up with a lob to win the point.

The Italian also tried an under-arm serve which didn't come off, while Fritz dictated play from the baseline and continues his impressive form at the season-ending championships, having reached the semi-finals in 2022.

On Sunday, former champion Alexander Zverev got underway with a straight-sets win over Ben Shelton.

Third seed Zverev downed Shelton 6-3, 7-6(8/6) in the first match of the Bjorn Borg Group, which also includes Italian top seed Jannik Sinner and Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime.

In a meeting between two of

the biggest servers in the sport, Zverev broke the American fifth seed twice in the opener to edge ahead after less than half-an-hour on court.

The second set then rumbled inevitably towards a tie-break with few break opportunities appearing for either player.

The 2018 and 2021 winner started the breaker sluggishly as Shelton soon brought himself up three set points at 6-3.

But Zverev started the fight-back with a superb backhand passing shot, before sealing match point at the first time of asking as Shelton hit long at the end of a lengthy rally.

"In the tie-break, he started off amazing," Zverev said. "I felt like I had to control the things that I could control. "I did that well at the end of the tie-break and I'm super happy with that win."—Agencies



TURIN: Taylor Fritz of the US hits a return against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti during their ATP Finals match at Palasport Olimpico on Monday.—AFP

Ghosh eyes T20 glory after ODI World Cup heroics

BENGALURU: Indian all-rounder Richa Ghosh has set her sights on Twenty20 World Cup glory after playing a key role in her country's historic One-day International crown despite battling a hairline fracture.

The 22-year-old from Siliguri in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal is confident that the Women's Premier League T20 competition, in which she represents Royal Challengers Bengaluru, can help her prepare for the shortest format of the game ahead of the T20 World Cup in England next year.

"The T20 World Cup is going to be very important for me. We have ticked the one-day World Cup [off our list] but we have to tick the T20 World Cup as well," Ghosh told Reuters over a video call.

"But before the World Cup, we have the WPL. So my main focus and mindset is on helping my team win, regardless of the tournament or format."

The wicket-keeper/batter has been retained by RCB alongside seasoned campaigners like Smriti Mandhana and Ellyse Perry for the next year's competition, and planning is in full swing for a repeat of their title success in 2024.

"I can't disclose all the things as of now but our main focus is to bring the second trophy home," she added.

Ghosh smashed her way into the record books during India's ODI world title win this year, equalling Deandra Dottin's mark of most sixes (12) in a women's World Cup edition as India defeated South Africa by 52 runs in the final.

Her heroics while managing a finger injury proved decisive in the knockout stages, as she struck 26 off 16 balls in the semi-final against Australia during India's record chase of 339, before contributing a crucial 24-ball 34 in the final.

"Each and every player faces ups and downs but how you tackle those lows is the real test of a player," Ghosh said.

"I was playing for the country and nothing else mattered to me. Apart from my mindset, the physios also helped me a lot and backed me. Their trust helped me to get over my injury."

The power-hitter, whose trophy cabinet includes the 2023 U-19 World Cup, the 2022 Asian Games gold and the 2022 Commonwealth Games silver since her international debut in 2020, said she hopes to enjoy similar success in the longest format as well.

"There is a different feeling while playing test cricket because as a batter you get many balls to bat. So, I want to score more and do much better in the red-ball format," she added.—Reuters

Norris clinches Sao Paulo GP to go 24 points clear at top

SAO PAULO: McLaren's Lando Norris won the Sao Paulo Grand Prix to surge 24 points clear in the Formula One championship on Sunday while teammate and title rival

Oscar Piastri finished fifth after being penalised for causing a collision.

Mercedes' teenage rookie Kimi Antonelli hung on for a career-best second place with



MCLAREN'S Lando Norris of Britain passes the chequered flag to win the Sao Paulo Grand Prix at Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace.—Reuters

Max Verstappen an astonishing third for Red Bull after starting from the pitlane.

Verstappen's performance was all the more impressive after the four-times world champion, who won from 17th at Interlagos last year, suffered an early slow puncture and had to fight back from 18th.

"Crazy race," said Norris of his second successive win and seventh of the season after snatching the championship lead from Piastri in Mexico last month.

"To be honest, I don't think we were the quickest today but I'm glad to take home the win.

"It's a great win. But seeing how quick Max was, it's disappointing we were not quicker."

Piastri, who started fourth with Norris on pole, served a 10-second penalty for an early clash with Antonelli that put

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc out of the race after they went three-abreast.

It was another massive blow for the Australian, who crashed out of the Saturday sprint that Norris won on a perfect weekend for the Briton who has moved up a gear and is the clear title favourite.

George Russell was fourth for Mercedes, who consolidated second place overall in a constructors' championship already won by McLaren.

With three races and a Saturday sprint remaining, Norris has 390 points to Piastri's 366 with Verstappen falling further behind on 341 and his hopes looking slim despite all the superlatives of his drive.

Oliver Bearman was sixth for Haas, another fine performance from the British rookie after his fourth in Mexico, with Liam Lawson seventh for Racing Bulls ahead of team-

mate Isack Hadjar.

Nico Hulkenberg finished ninth for Sauber and Pierre Gasly completed the points positions for Renault-owned Alpine, a year on from the team's double podium in Brazil.

Sauber's Gabriel Bortoletto completed a miserable weekend for Brazil's only driver, spinning into the wall on the opening lap after being squeezed by Aston Martin's Lance Stroll as Norris led cleanly away.

The crash brought out the safety car, with Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton pitting for a new front wing after he collided with Williams' Carlos Sainz and Alpine's Franco Colapinto.

The seven-time world champion and honorary Brazilian continued with a damaged floor but was given a five-second penalty for causing a collision and then retired.

The double driver retire-

ment was Ferrari's third of the season and dropped them down to fourth, behind Red Bull in third.

The safety car came in at the end of lap five and Piastri locked up and made contact with Antonelli, who was pushed into Leclerc, at the restart.

The Ferrari lost a tyre and stopped, triggering a virtual safety car.

"He [Antonelli] left me no space," the Australian said over the team radio but stewards disagreed in what some pundits and even rivals felt was a harsh decision.

"I wouldn't go as far as saying that it's all Oscar's fault. I don't think it is," said Leclerc.

Verstappen, who had a new engine and plenty of other changed parts after qualifying 16th, suffered a slow front-right puncture on lap eight after climbing to 13th.

He was up to fourth after 24

of the 71 laps, setting fastest laps and on lap 51 took the lead when Norris made his second and final stop.

Verstappen pitted again on lap 54, dropping to fourth and lighting the touch paper on a thrilling chase for the podium.

He passed Russell around the outside at turn one on lap 63 and Antonelli was in his sights four laps later, but the tyres then dropped off and the Italian made no mistakes.

"To be on the podium, I did not expect that at all," said Verstappen. "To finish only 10 seconds from the lead is incredible."

His team-mate Yuki Tsunoda was the final driver classified after two 10-second penalties, the second for not serving the first correctly.

The next race is Las Vegas on Nov 22, the first of a final triple header ending in Abu Dhabi on Dec 7.—Reuters